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A SPY'S ODYSSEY

By Philip Bennett
Globe Staff

When Dr. Alfred Zehe walked across the Glenicke Bridge into East Germany yesterday along with three other convicted spies, his repatriation ended an odyssey that began more than a year and a half ago at the Sheraton Boston Hotel.



Zehe, 45, a professor of physics at Dresden University, was arrested on espionage charges while attending a scientific conference at the hotel in November 1983. During more than a year of pretrial motions, while he was held first without bail and later allowed to live under tight restrictions in an expensive Back Bay apartment, Zehe maintained his innocence.

In February, however, a week before his trial was to begin in US District Court, Zehe changed his plea to guilty, admitting that he had purchased classified US military documents. Facing a possible life prison term, he was sentenced to eight years in prison and fined \$5,000.

Before he was flown to West Germany on Monday, Zehe had served little more than two months of his sentence at the Federal Correctional Institution at Ray Brook, near Lake Placid, N.Y.

Attorneys involved in the case declined to comment yesterday on any relation between Zehe's change of plea and his repatriation. Sources close to the case, however, said that Zehe's inclusion in the prisoner exchange was not unexpected.

An order reducing Zehe's sentence to time served and vacating his fine was issued by US District Judge David S. Nelson June 4 at the request of attorneys for Zehe and the government. The order was impounded by the judge until yesterday.

"We are very pleased that professor Zehe is back home with his family," said one of his attorneys, Jeanne Baker. "Under the peculiar circumstances of this case, we feel that for professor Zehe to have been returned so swiftly is the appropriate resolution of this case."

Zehe admitted to paying \$15,800 for classified information given him by a Navy civilian employee who was working for the FBI as an undercover agent. Zehe's fingerprints were found on one of the bills.

Zehe gave the Navy employee, William H. Tanner Jr., a special camera and film, which Tanner used to photograph classified documents relating to an antisubmarine system and a Navy communications master plan.

Following his arrest, Zehe was held without bail at the Plymouth County House of Correction. Last June, when Judge Nelson set bail at \$500,000, the money was posted by a representative of the East German government. Zehe moved into an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue, which he was permitted to leave only during daylight hours.

Zehe, an authority on solid state physics, is the holder of three doctoral degrees and a dozen patents, including two from the US government. He has lectured extensively in the United States, Mexico and Europe, and has published 200 scientific articles.

ZEHE
Exchanged